

Section 2

Organizational Characteristics of the Region

Organizational Characteristics of the Region A/Enrollment Projections

During the initial stages of discussion about regionalization, the Planning Board commissioned NESDEC to complete a thorough analysis of all information which would be important in the decision making process. The NESDEC projections did not include potential new housing development in Ayer and Lunenburg, nor do the projections include school choice in all three communities. The five year (2012-2013) and ten year (2017-2018) projections suggest a slight decline although really quite stable enrollment.

These enrollment projections support the following conclusions:

- Each community can sustain an “in-town” educational model for grades K-5 into the relatively long term future. The model can be sustained without need for new construction although it is likely that renovation and system needs (HVAC, roofs, etc.) will be needed.
- Similar conclusions can be drawn for grades 6-8 as well. While similar renovation/system needs are likely, the long term Shirley/Lura White building issue appears to be resolved.
- The high school projections clearly present the need for a new building to house 900+ students in grades 9-12. While the projected enrollments never exceed 1,000 students, an interesting point could be made that building for 1,200 students would allow the admission of 150-200 school choice students comfortably and add significant revenue to the region.

We recommend that a consistent (three town) independent enrollment projection be done in 2008-2009.



New England School Development Council

January 29, 2008

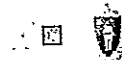
TO: Regional Planning Committee

FROM: Donald G. Kennedy, Ed.D.

RE: **Enrollment Trends – Residents Only**

Displayed below are the enrollment trends of school-age residents of Ayer, Lunenburg, and Shirley. **These numbers will not match current public school registrations which are skewed by school choice in/out enrollments.** In 2007-08, Ayer has 3 Lunenburg Choice students and 47 from Shirley (below HS); Lunenburg has no Choice students from Ayer or Shirley; Shirley has 1 Choice student from Ayer and 5 from Lunenburg. Each of the three districts currently is trending toward steady-to-slightly-fewer resident students...although trends can change.

Residents Only		2007-08	2012-13	2017-18
Lunenburg	K-5	696	655	674
	6-8	392	394	368
	9-12	471	437	418
Ayer	K-5	481	405	415
	6-8	226	248	189
	9-12	249	248	241
Shirley	K-5	418	414	409
	6-8	209	207	204
	9-12	237	232	226
Ayer+Shirley+ Lunenburg	K-5	1595	1474	1498
	6-8	827	849	761
	9-12	957	917	885
Ayer+Shirley	K-5	899	819	824
	6-8	435	455	393
	9-12	486	480	467
Lunenburg+ Shirley	K-5	1141	1069	1083
	6-8	601	601	572
	9-12	708	669	644



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School Finance: Statistical Comparisons

Long-term trends in individual districts' grade PK to 12 enrollment

Select District: 019 - AYER

019 - AYER

Last updated 5/18/2007

FY	PK	K	UG	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11	G12	Total
1988	14	313	75	277	215	203	145	165	148	183	154	185	155	149	143	2,524
1989	13	261	71	320	221	191	168	135	139	151	154	159	144	142	124	2,393
1990	14	251	16	286	269	218	196	191	137	149	147	145	161	128	134	2,442
1991	15	278	0	270	219	227	182	152	174	107	126	136	128	123	125	2,262
1992	14	256	0	285	235	203	208	193	148	160	93	132	111	106	113	2,257
1993	14	243	0	223	219	171	171	167	161	112	139	84	95	87	91	1,977
1994	5	193	3	203	183	185	148	162	147	129	91	113	64	84	75	1,785
1995	0	158	0	159	126	121	131	111	110	110	88	93	74	45	63	1,389
1996	7	138	0	110	115	93	79	92	75	81	85	66	72	61	41	1,115
1997	19	108	0	115	91	98	82	67	74	69	67	102	64	65	62	1,083
1998	16	102	0	96	113	86	94	79	77	77	73	87	102	66	62	1,130
1999	29	119	0	105	97	108	91	94	81	80	69	96	84	91	63	1,207
2000	29	131	0	109	106	100	101	93	88	80	85	100	93	75	79	1,269
2001	31	128	0	125	110	106	103	94	102	88	80	94	86	97	74	1,318
2002	87	110	0	126	123	110	106	100	95	93	84	113	90	86	88	1,411
2003	80	112	0	104	123	129	103	97	99	86	88	99	108	88	74	1,390
2004	93	118	0	110	89	122	119	92	95	93	85	101	92	101	80	1,390
2005	90	111	0	106	100	87	107	112	93	84	94	97	95	90	102	1,368
2006	86	93	0	103	101	93	85	99	111	81	87	118	92	91	85	1,325
2007	54	113	0	88	92	96	85	77	95	97	83	95	112	95	88	1,270

Source:

- Through 2001, Individual School Reports, as submitted by superintendents to the Mass Dept of Education, Oct 1 of each fiscal year (e.g. FY2000=Oct 1, 1999).
- The source for 2002 and beyond is the DOE Student Information Management System
- UG/SP refers to ungraded, special education pupils. Beginning in 2004, these are special ed pupils beyond grade 12 under the age of 22.
- Pupils tuitioned to other districts, charters, or special education schools are not included. Tuitioned-in non-residents are included.

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School Finance: Statistical Comparisons

Long-term trends in individual districts' grade PK to 12 enrollment

Select District: 162 - LUNENBURG

Last updated 5/18/2007

162 - LUNENBURG

FY	PK	K	UG	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11	G12	Total
1988	74	101	14	132	112	111	128	120	93	115	112	117	130	124	100	1,583
1989	85	127	16	125	134	112	117	129	125	93	109	100	105	118	111	1,606
1990	45	132	1	124	125	140	109	121	128	128	100	117	97	111	117	1,595
1991	42	134	0	137	121	120	130	109	114	128	116	91	107	102	110	1,561
1992	49	95	0	134	139	125	118	131	108	114	127	131	82	99	92	1,544
1993	45	146	0	103	149	142	130	129	148	123	124	146	138	97	94	1,714
1994	45	121	0	162	109	150	155	130	140	148	115	145	135	117	86	1,758
1995	47	117	0	128	160	116	150	152	150	142	139	123	135	119	108	1,786
1996	45	128	2	137	129	162	116	151	158	140	147	147	112	118	96	1,788
1997	73	115	1	141	140	134	169	124	159	154	143	137	139	103	111	1,843
1998	73	118	0	128	147	148	132	162	131	149	154	141	132	124	90	1,829
1999	72	104	0	124	126	147	156	128	163	126	142	156	137	130	119	1,830
2000	72	126	0	112	135	139	144	165	127	156	134	148	155	120	128	1,861
2001	65	120	0	129	128	136	141	157	172	123	156	142	158	147	115	1,889
2002	59	114	0	116	130	129	137	147	162	163	132	168	131	139	123	1,850
2003	66	124	0	122	118	136	133	143	150	151	156	153	172	132	131	1,887
2004	57	108	0	109	126	111	138	143	147	148	154	149	155	154	131	1,830
2005	67	103	1	114	110	128	116	144	145	137	138	180	148	145	146	1,822
2006	52	128	4	113	125	113	129	128	149	137	143	148	183	145	139	1,836
2007	55	116	5	128	117	127	120	130	131	143	143	148	159	173	149	1,844

Source:

- Through 2001, Individual School Reports, as submitted by superintendents to the Mass Dept of Education, Oct 1 of each fiscal year (e.g. FY2000=Oct 1, 1999).
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School Finance: Statistical Comparisons

Long-term trends in individual districts' grade PK to 12 enrollment

Select District: 270 - SHIRLEY

270 - SHIRLEY

Last updated 5/18/2007

FY	PK	K	UG	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11	G12	Total
1988	6	48	0	46	58	52	66	55	48	40	55	0	0	0	0	474
1989	11	59	0	56	51	52	60	64	60	48	41	0	0	0	0	502
1990	11	59	0	66	56	52	57	66	58	73	53	0	0	0	0	551
1991	16	68	0	67	60	58	57	64	63	60	66	0	0	0	0	579
1992	15	68	8	85	66	66	57	50	69	62	58	0	0	0	0	604
1993	20	65	6	82	76	51	61	53	43	61	64	0	0	0	0	582
1994	28	62	8	73	70	65	56	61	58	46	50	0	0	0	0	577
1995	24	76	0	66	83	79	68	58	66	56	39	0	0	0	0	615
1996	29	86	0	78	69	88	85	66	54	57	56	0	0	0	0	668
1997	32	86	0	81	74	69	91	85	65	51	55	0	0	0	0	689
1998	31	84	0	79	73	74	74	87	89	68	49	0	0	0	0	708
1999	59	108	0	83	80	79	74	72	93	78	65	0	0	0	0	791
2000	83	82	0	81	82	75	82	72	72	85	69	0	0	0	0	783
2001	60	82	0	81	83	78	82	80	78	63	88	0	0	0	0	775
2002	58	90	0	79	78	73	73	86	80	71	61	0	0	0	0	749
2003	69	72	0	82	69	86	72	74	84	86	64	0	0	0	0	758
2004	75	76	0	56	81	70	88	73	70	73	90	0	0	0	0	752
2005	77	79	0	71	58	80	70	83	67	62	71	0	0	0	0	718
2006	63	78	0	63	64	57	79	64	82	55	57	0	0	0	0	662
2007	67	76	0	77	62	66	53	74	62	66	52	0	0	0	0	655

Source:

- Through 2001, Individual School Reports, as submitted by superintendents to the Mass Dept of Education, Oct 1 of each fiscal year (e.g. FY2000=Oct 1, 1999).
- The source for 2002 and beyond is the DOE Student Information Management System
- UG/SP refers to ungraded, special education pupils. Beginning in 2004, these are special ed pupils beyond grade 12 under the age of 22.
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B/Grade Structure and School Configuration

Initially, the grade structure of the region would continue as:

- PreK-5 Elementary (Ayer & Shirley with single buildings and Lunenburg with two – PreK-2 and 3-5)
- 6-8 Middle School *
- 9-12 High School **

During the first few years of operating a regional district, a critical element for success will be a measured/thoughtful infusion of change. One area of concern will be where students will physically attend school and how the grade levels will be organized. To ease this potential issue, the plan should include a stable experience for grades K-5; hence, maintaining existing pre-regional status makes great sense.

Middle school organization could be used as a problem solving mechanism. Shirley facility issues with Lura White could be addressed by reassignment. This option will need significant discussion.

The ultimate goal for grades 9-12 will involve the construction of a new 1000-1200 student facility. This is clearly the preferred (and perhaps even necessary) option for the regionalization venture. Unfortunately, this option will be several years in the future before fruition. In order to move the three communities (two existing high school facilities) toward a single merged regional high school, consideration will have to be given to operating two separate buildings. How to organize the two facilities (several miles distant from each other) will engender much discussion. However, the challenge will bring opportunity..... Extended day options, distance on-line learning, video conferencing for low enrollment courses will become reality based decisions.

* It is possible that Ayer and Shirley could merge their respective 6-8 grades at Ayer Middle/High School. This would allow Shirley the option to avoid major renovations to Lura White School. Shirley could utilize its newer middle school for PreK-grade 5.

** The high school model (grades 9-12) would likely utilize two buildings in the initial years of the region. Further discussion of the breakdown by grade would be needed. Two 9-12 high schools is one option but a grade 9-10 and a grade 11-12 configuration is another possible option.

Town	School	Grades	Year of Construction	2007-2008 Enrollment (Including School Choice)	Current Operating Capacity
Ayer	Page Hilltop Elementary School	PK-5	Page – 1957 Hilltop – 1964 Addition - 1981	600	830
Ayer	Middle School*	6-8	1963 Addition/Renovation 1993/1994	280	394**
Ayer	High School*	9-12	1963 Addition/Renovation 1993/1994	390	743
Lunenburg	Primary School	PK-2	2004	410	426
Lunenburg	T.C. Passios Elementary School	3-5	1951 Addition 1976	371	391
Lunenburg	Turkey Hill Middle School	6-8	1969	425	492**
Lunenburg	High School	9-12	1957 Addition 1958	621	672-801****
Shirley	Lura White Elementary School	PK-4	1936 Addition 1970	364	459
Shirley	Middle School	5-8	2003	260	486**

Calculations of student capacity were based upon an assumption of PK=15 students per class; Kindergarten=20 students per class; regular elementary classrooms = 23 students per class; middle and high school classrooms = 25 students per class.

*The Ayer High School and the Middle School are located in the same building.

C/D/E/F Compatibility, Capacity, Characteristics

As part of the information gathering process, NESDEC was contracted to develop a wide ranging report which addressed many of the issues noted above. Included in our response to these issues, is the first part of the first section of that report. That section notes opportunities and challenges and a description of educational programs. Included also are spread sheets culled from several different sources (Mass Municipal Assn., DOR, etc.) which present demographic/socio economic/financial information which speak to the issues noted. Specifically, the information is:

- Attachment 1: NESDEC Report Section 1
- Attachment 2: Socio economic/demographic/educational info
- Attachment 3: Financial/Revenue Info

Generally speaking, the information speaks to three distinct communities with greater similarities than differences.

The three communities are linearly contiguous but not mutually so (see Map). They are all “central Massachusetts” in outlook and share similar geographic challenges. As the communities have grown, they are closely tied to Routes 2, 2A, 119 and 495 for connections to work. They also are impacted by dependency to rail travel. All (Lunenburg to a much lesser degree) were and are affected by the Devens “situation”.

All three communities have been affected by difficult economic times as they have attempted to recapitalize the towns. New schools, public safety buildings, library and other public renovations have been completed while other building challenges are discussed (school building or renovations are needed). All of the communities are pushed to the financial limit. Regionalization, though not a silver bullet, does present an opportunity to address needs more effectively through a collective effort.

Beyond the presented data in the attachments, what other “connections” exist? There are many people who identify an existing affinity between Ayer and Shirley. That is a reasonably accurate perception. However, similar attachments exist amongst the three communities:

- High school tuition agreement for Shirley students
- Cooperative high school athletic endeavors (hockey) which bring students together
- Representation from the three communities on regional boards
 - Nashoba Valley Hospital
 - Scouting Councils
 - Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce

- Participation in FLLAC collaborative for Special Education and other services
- The beginning stages of sharing personnel functions
 - Food Service
 - Business Services
 - Professional development activities

The Ayer/Shirley connections noted above are:

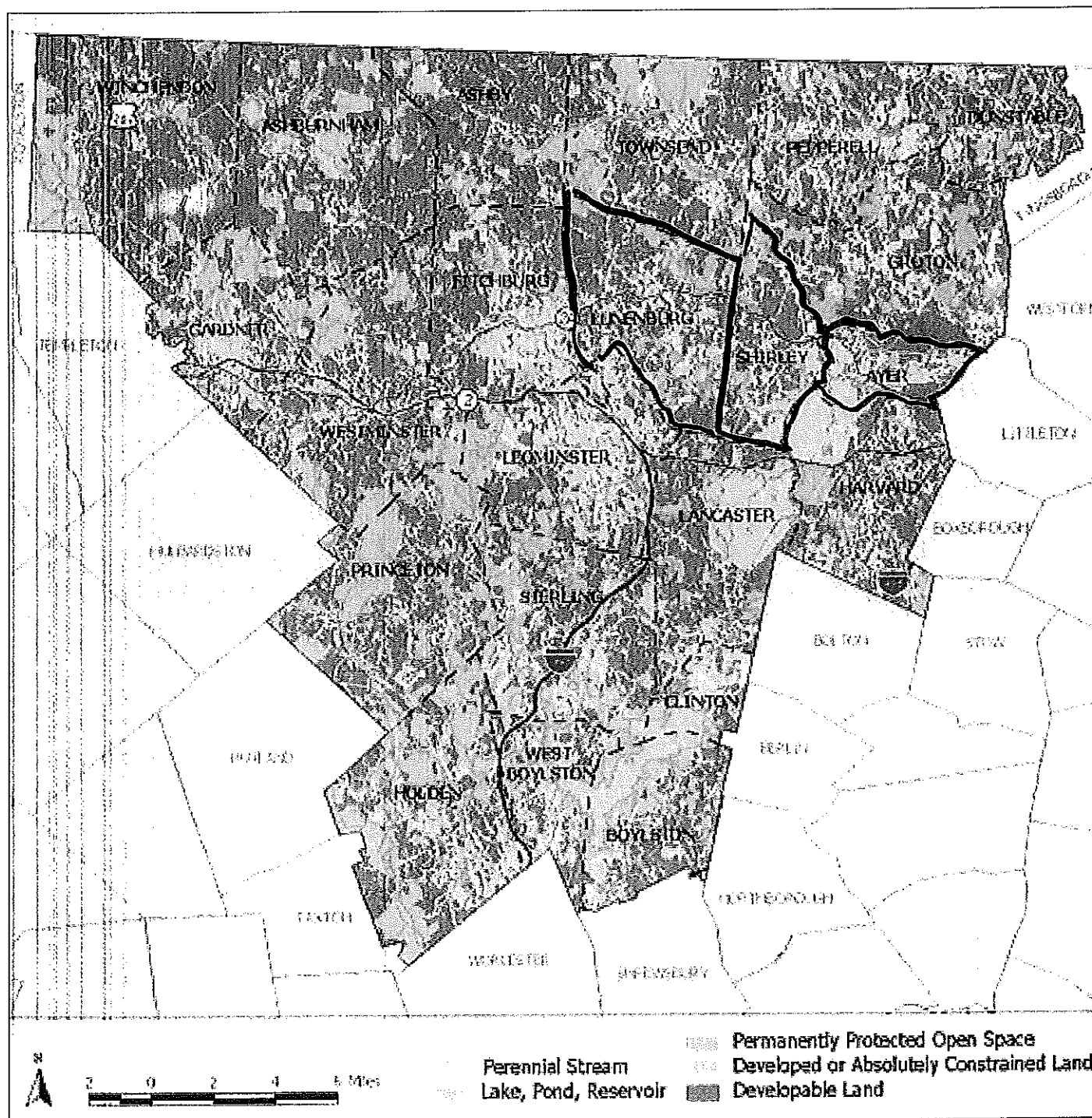
- Merged youth sports activities
 - Soccer
 - Football
 - Cheerleading
- The recently completed “shared ministry” merger of the Ayer and Shirley Catholic churches
- The significant number of Shirley residents who graduated from Ayer High School (This number is growing for Lunenburg as well)
- The “Devens Connection”/Ayer and Shirley communities have been integrally involved in determining the direction for the future of Devens
 - Planning Boards
 - DEAC

These attachments are all supportive of regional approaches to services and provide infrastructure to a regional approach to education.

Buildout Map of Nashua River Valley

A window to the future: each of the regional buildout maps in this book is a summarized version of EOE's five-map buildout series created on the community level for all 351 municipalities in the state.

This map shows in pink, lands that are already built out or constrained from development due to steep slopes, wetlands or other factors. Lands in green are permanently protected from development. The remaining lands in brown are unprotected developable lands. (See summary pie chart on preceding page.)



AYER-LUNENBURG-SHIRLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT REGIONALIZATION PLANNING

TOPIC: Geographical and physical characteristics of a region

SUMMARY

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Socioeconomic data for Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley are quite similar
- Tax levy for the support of education by the community differs: Shirley is lowest at 40.97%, second is Ayer at 51.10% and Lunenburg is highest at 56.80%
- State aid to each community varies – Shirley at 38.16%, Lunenburg at 25.02% and Ayer at 21.79%
- Average property tax bills were also in a range – Ayer – \$2,986, Shirley - \$3,291 and Lunenburg - \$3,774

CHALLENGES:

- The socioeconomic data is not equal in Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley
- Current state aid is greater in Shirley, followed by Ayer and then Lunenburg
- Population numbers will impact the membership on a new regional school committee with Lunenburg having more votes on the regional school committee (number of members? weighted voting?)

ATTACHMENTS

1. At A Glance Report for each community – Massachusetts Department of Revenue

Section 2

Appendices

AYER-LUNENBURG-SHIRLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT REGIONALIZATION PLANNING

TOPIC: Expected benefits of reorganization

SUMMARY

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley have many formal and informal educational connections in education
- All three school systems share similar mission and vision statements that support student learning and high student achievement
- Ability to expand the curricula offerings for students at the middle and high schools
- Expand the existing AP courses and the opportunity for more students to enroll in AP courses at the high school (only Lunenburg High School currently offers AP courses – English, Math, Foreign Languages, Science, Social Studies and Art)
- The current educational leaders are educational professionals that want the best possible education for all students
- Greater utilization of central office support staff in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment and special education

CHALLENGES:

- There is a long history of the three school systems operating as separate school systems
- The question of merging Ayer High School with Lunenburg High School into one high school or operating one high school using two campuses
- Developing a unified special education program that fully aligns with the federal and state regulations of IDEA and Chapter 766
- Dealing with the vocational school tuition of students from Ayer
- Coordinating the prek-12 curriculum from three school districts to one regional school district
- Not every town has economic, English Language Learner (ELL), and racial/ethnic diversity; a regional district will serve all students

ATTACHMENTS

1. Report by Dr. Davis on each school system – eight areas - Part 1.
2. Report by Dr. Davis – Focus on the High Schools - Part 2.
3. Summary of Major Educational Issues – Part 3.
4. 2007 Test Results – MA DOE (Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley)
5. Special Education Advisory 2007-1; IDEA Implementation Regulations
6. Special Education Advisory 2006-2; Changes to the State Special Education Regulations

AYER – LUNENBURG – SHIRLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT REGIONALIZATION PLANNING

REPORT: EXPECTED BENEFITS OF REORGANIZATION

This section will report on the educational benefits of reorganization with a focus on opportunities and challenges to reorganization. The data that was reviewed for this section of the report included data supplied by the three school districts and site visits to the three school districts. In addition, a separate site visit was made to Ayer High School and Lunenburg High School to review the educational programs and to report on opportunities and challenges of a possible reorganization of the two high schools to one new regional high school.

PART 1 – REVIEW OF EACH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Student Learning:

Ayer Public Schools-Lunenburg Public Schools-Shirley Public Schools Common Vision and Mission Statements

Each of the three school districts operates with a vision, mission and set of core values. It is clear that all three school districts are committed to student learning and helping all students achieve. The leadership team in each school district is leading by example to raise the level of student achievement for all students. Each school district has a long history of being an independent school district. But, that same history has students from Shirley choosing to enroll at either Ayer High School or Lunenburg High School because Shirley does not have a high school.

The Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley School Districts have much in common and share a basic belief to provide students with a positive learning environment. There is a current level of professional collaboration among the three school systems. The current school administrators work together on several professional learning issues and share a mutual respect for each other.

Ayer Public Schools

1. Student Learning – The Ayer Public Schools are committed to student learning for all students from PreK to grade twelve.
2. Curriculum – The Ayer Public Schools have aligned their curriculum to meet the grade level standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. There is a

need to review the current Ayer curriculum in several areas. Ayer High School is currently preparing to introduce AP courses to its program of studies.

3. Instruction – The Ayer Public Schools use a variety of instructional grouping strategies to serve the needs of a diverse student population. There is a history of teacher professional development to help classroom teachers develop more effective teaching strategies.
4. Assessment – The Ayer Public Schools are making progress helping all students meet the NCLB mandate to reach the proficient or above level of achievement by 2014. The 2007 MCAS assessment results show both areas of improvement and concern at each grade level. The Ayer Public Schools are using the MCAS assessment data to improve student achievement and make changes to current instructional practice. Ayer High School is beginning the process to be ready for a NEASC review.
5. Education opportunities – The Ayer Public Schools has a rich history of providing quality public education to the citizens of Ayer and the recently closed army base. The community of Ayer has a very diverse population that is reflected in the public schools.
6. Student activities – Ayer High School offers its students a variety of athletic and extra curricula activities. Due to the recent decline in the high school student population, Ayer High School has formed coop athletic teams in football and ice hockey.
7. Special education – The Ayer Public Schools are trying to meet the ever increasing demands of students with disabilities. Recently, new in-district special education programs have been developed to better serve students with emotional issues. The Ayer Public Schools utilize special education programs from area educational collaboratives. Special education demands are challenging the Ayer Public Schools to develop new programs and to fund them.
8. Teacher utilization – The Ayer Public Schools operate two schools located on the same campus. This allows several teachers to serve a broader range of students. Due to retirements there are many teachers in the Ayer Public Schools with less than three years of service in Ayer. The decline in student enrollment does impact the number of teachers in the Ayer Public Schools.

Lunenburg Public Schools

1. Student Learning – The Lunenburg Public Schools Mission Statement is to prepare our students for a lifelong learning and responsible community membership. The Vision of the schools prides itself on excellence in a child-centered environment that challenges all learners to achieve their highest potential. This is accomplished through a partnership with a supportive community. The Lunenburg Public Schools is an active Professional Learning Community. The leadership team of the schools is focused on student learning. The administrators, teachers, staff and parents are actively engaged in the school

improvement process. The Lunenburg Public Schools serve students in pre-k – grade twelve.

2. Curriculum – The Lunenburg Public Schools have aligned their curriculum to meet the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks at all grade levels. The schools are engaged in a new balanced literacy program and revisions to its math program.
3. Instruction – The instructional practices in the Lunenburg Public Schools are part of the professional development program for teachers and staff. The leadership team of the schools makes the connection between improved instructional practices through ongoing site based professional development activities.
4. Assessment – The Lunenburg Public Schools are committed to the NCLB mandate of having all students at a proficient level in English Language Arts and Math by the 2014 school year. The results of the 2007 MCAS assessments shows that the students in grade 3-8 are making progress toward the NCLB goal of proficiency. The grade 10 MCAS results show an improvement in raising student achievement for the past three years. The leadership team of the schools conducts a comprehensive analysis of its MCAS assessment results and uses this data to drive instructional practice. Lunenburg High School is preparing for a NEASC school visit.
5. Education opportunities – The Lunenburg Public Schools offer several educational opportunities to students at all grade levels. There are enrichment programs for students. The high school offers several AP courses to challenge students.
6. Student activities – The Lunenburg Public Schools offers athletic and extra curricula activities. Due to the smaller student population at the high school there is currently a cooperative ice hockey team with Ayer High School.
7. Special education – The Lunenburg Public Schools designed and implemented several new and innovative special education programs in the schools. These programs have lowered the number of students from the Lunenburg Public Schools that are placed in out-of-district special education settings. The leadership team of the schools is committed to the special education Inclusion Model to keep students with a disability in the least restrictive environment.
8. Teacher utilization – The Lunenburg Public Schools has recently seen several senior teachers retire. The current faculty is now represented with a blend of new and experienced teachers at each school.

Shirley Public Schools

1. Student Learning – The Shirley Public Schools are organized to serve students in pre-k to grade eight. There is no high school in the town of Shirley. The grade eight students from Shirley have options to attend, Ayer High School, Lunenburg High School and Nashoba Vocational High School. The Mission Statement of the Shirley Public Schools is to inspire students in a nurturing environment to become independent thinkers, life long learners and responsible members of the world family. The focus of the Shirley Public Schools is on each student meeting with

- success. The schools are organized with a single elementary school and middle school.
2. Curriculum - The curriculum in the Shirley Public Schools is organized to meet the grade level standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Recently the Shirley Public Schools revised its English Language Arts and Math curriculums.
 3. Instruction – The Shirley Public Schools attempt to provide small class size to allow for differentiated instruction in each classroom. Some elective classes at the middle school are not offered due to budget issues.
 4. Assessment – The Shirley Public Schools are working toward the NCLB requirement of having all students at proficient or above by the 2014 school year. The 2007 MCAS assessment results show several areas of improvement and a few areas of concern due to lower scores. The leadership team is currently analyzing the MCAS data to develop recommendation to improve student performance.
 5. Education opportunities – The Shirley Public Schools offers a few areas of academic enrichment at the elementary and middle schools. The leadership team works with school administrators from Ayer and Lunenburg to insure that students leaving Shirley Middle School at the end of eighth grade are prepared for high school.
 6. Student activities – There are limited student activities at the Shirley Middle School.
 7. Special education – The Shirley Public Schools are committed to the inclusion of students with a disability to remain in the public school setting. The Shirley Public Schools coordinate the special education services needed by students leaving grade eight and going to one of the area high schools. This presents a challenge for the special education staff in Shirley due to the lack of a community high school. Shirley is an active participant in the FLAC Collaborative special education programs.
 8. Teacher utilization – The Shirley Public Schools has seen a major turnover of teaching staff at the Middle School in the past two years. A significant number of teachers are new to the Shirley Middle School faculty and there has been a change in the leadership team.

REGIONALIZATION:

The Shirley Public Schools have a contract with both the Ayer and Lunenburg Public Schools for Shirley students to attend Ayer High School or Lunenburg High School. Students who want a vocational high school program can apply to one of the regional vocational high schools. The three school districts do not belong to the same regional vocational high school.

The towns of Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley are exploring the option of forming a new regional school district to provide public education to the students from the three communities.

There are several possible options to form a new regional school district. This is a partial list of the options:

- a prek to grade 12 regional school district for Ayer-Lunenburg-Shirley
- a two town regional school district pre-k to grade twelve (Ayer-Shirley, Shirley-Lunenburg or Ayer-Lunenburg)
- a three town regional high school district grades 9-12
- a three town regional secondary school district grades 6-12
- a two town regional school district high school 9-12 or secondary district 6-12 (Ayer-Shirley, Shirley-Lunenburg or Ayer-Lunenburg)
- additional regional options can be considered based on specific requests from the communities

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley have many formal and informal connections in education
- All schools share similar mission and vision statements that support student learning and high student achievement
- The current individual school leaders are education professional that want to see the best possible education for all students
- The current student enrollments will not create a large regional school district
- The students from the three communities have much in common both in school and outside of school
- All schools are focused on a curriculum that is designed to meet the grade level standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks
- The teachers in all three schools are represented by a blend of both new and experienced teachers
- The school building leadership teams are supportive of efforts to improve student learning in a period of limited financial resources
- A sharing of teacher professional development activities among the three school district
- Greater utilization of central office support staff in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment and special education

CHALLENGES:

- Ayer, Lunenburg and Shirley have operated separate school district for the past forty years
- The reorganization of the schools into a new regional school district is filled with many unanswered questions
- The teachers in the three school districts have separate teacher contracts and working conditions
- A new regional school district will serve a more diverse group of students
- The current special education programs will need to be transitioned to a common model of service delivery in a new regional school district

- A new district leadership team will need to be appointed to serve the new regional school district
- The possible move to one high school will require a transition plan to identify and address student, teacher, parent and community concerns
- Current special education programs will need to be consolidated using a common model to deliver services
- Out-of-district special education placement costs will need to be addressed in the regional agreement, what town will pay for the placement
- Vocational school options for high school students are not the same in each community

PART 2 – FOCUS ON THE HIGH SCHOOLS

FOCUS ON AYER AND LUNENBURG HIGH SCHOOLS:

- Currently there are two high schools in the three communities – Ayer High School and Lunenburg High School
- Both high schools are limited by low student enrollment and budgets to offer a fuller range of courses and at different instructional levels
- Each community (Ayer and Lunenburg) have a strong connection to the history and traditions of its high school
- The students at each high school have pride in their school
- The two high schools compete against each other in sports
- The two high schools have students on a coop boys' ice hockey team
- Both high schools are in need of major capital improvements
- The MSBA responded to the Statement of Interest from Ayer and Lunenburg for capital improvements of the high schools with a request for a regional assessment
- There will be a leadership change at Ayer High School possibly at the end of the 08-09 school year
- There is an effective and creative principal at Lunenburg High School with a vision to improve student learning for all students
- The students from Shirley move to an out of town high school at the end of grade eight
- The high school students have much more in common with students from the two other towns thru informal and formal contacts
- The high school teachers must be a part of the planning for a new regional high school
- There must be active participation by the communities to shape the identity of a new regional high school
- The new standards for NEASC accreditation focus on the achievement of all students with a school that is responsive to all students
- There are opportunities in the formation of a new regional high school to plan for integration of technology in all curricula areas of instruction

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Two small high schools coming together to form a medium size high school
- More educational options for the students attending a regional high school in academics and extra-curricula activities
- An educational community that has a more diverse student enrollment
- More teaching positions to offer an expanded program of studies
- Options to have special programs for students with a disability
- Option to develop stronger middle school academic programs that will start students on a track to take AP courses at the high school
- Options to expand AP courses for students
- Ability to offer full athletic program at both JV and Varsity levels
- More options to use limited financial resources to meet the needs of students
- A blending of teachers from two schools with both teaching experience and professional credentials
- Better utilization of student support staff to serve students and parents
- Creating a two campus high school
- Use technology as a communication bridge for teachers, students and parents
- Create innovative student programs to serve student needs
- State funding of regional transportation of students

CHALLENGES:

- It takes time to create a new high school
- Must have a transition committee of administrators, teachers, students and parents to plan the new regional high school
- Current high schools are both in need of major capital renovation
- Work with the Massachusetts School Building Authority to plan a capital project for the new regional school district
- Location of the new high school
- Transportation of students
- A possible two campus high school for the initial start of the new three town regional high school
- Two campus shuttle busses
- Building a new high school culture
- Leadership of the change process to create a new high school
- Professional development for the two faculties to form a new high school

PART 3 – SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF MAJOR EDUCATIONAL ISSUES:

- Special education programs prek-12
 - The new regional school district will need to establish a model to deliver special education services to students

- The Lunenburg special education service delivery model is aligned with the IDEA Inclusion Model and with the Response To Intervention model
- The current out-of-district special education tuition costs must be addressed in the regional school agreement
- Parents of students with a disability must be involved in the development of the special education programs for the new regional school district
- FY 07 special education students claimed under the Circuit Breaker Funding – Ayer-23, Lunenburg-24 and Shirley-21
- Vocational school option for the students from three towns
 - Two towns belong to separate regional vocational school district
 - One of the towns does not formally belong to a regional vocation school district
 - The regional school agreement must address how to fund the regional vocational school assessments or tuition payments
- A new regional high school
 - Possible two campus model for the high school
 - Planning and designing a new regional high school campus
- Transition of middle school students to high school
 - Coordinating middle school programs to transition to a new regional high school program of studies
 - Development of new middle school courses that will help students prepare for high school AP courses
- School Choice students
 - How many school choice students in the new regional school district?
 - Issues of diversity of the school choice students
 - The budget impact of school choice students coming to the new regional school district
 - The budget impact of school choice students leaving the new regional school district
- Coordinating the curriculum prek-12
 - It will take two to three years to fully coordinate the curriculum prek-12
 - There will be a budget cost to coordinate the instructional materials in the three school districts
 - The regional school district must have a director of curriculum, instruction and assessment to deal with the prek-12 curriculum coordination
- Professional development of teachers and staff
 - The current professional development programs must be expanded to give teachers time to transition to a new regional school district
 - The new region will need a transition professional development committee of teacher and administrators to design and implement the professional development activities for teachers
- Capital project – high school – working with MSBA
 - A school building committee must be formed to consider the options to address the issue of a renovated or new high school facility
 - MSBA has specific procedures that must be followed to gain support for state funding of a capital project for the new regional school district-

- Current school facilities
 - The three towns must address the ownership of the current school facilities that will be used by the new regional school district
 - Current community use of the school facilities must be addressed in a school committee policy
- Collective bargaining contracts
 - Each school district has several collective bargaining contract with professional and support staff
 - Massachusetts General Laws provide a mechanism to bring the collective bargaining contract into a new regional school district
 - In general salaries are moved to the highest individual level among the current contracts for the new regional school district
 - The matter of working conditions in the current contract is a more complex issue that will involve impact bargaining with the newly formed regional school district unions
 - Legal counsel will need to advise the new regional school committee on how to proceed with the contract negotiations
- School leadership team – planning the transition to a regional school district
 - The current school administrators will need professional development activities to prepare to lead in a new regional school district setting
 - The current school leadership team must be reorganized to respond to the new regional school district
 - The central office administrators will need time to make the transition to the new regional school model
 - The central office administrative support staff will need to be identified, hired and trained to work in a regional school district model